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ABSTRACT

Chapter 15 of a revised volume on school leadership, this chapter defines and categorizes conflict and outlines techniques for its management in schools. Conflict, endemic to human existence, exists on many levels and assumes various forms. This chapter focuses on social conflict, or antagonistic interaction between individuals or groups common to the school environment. The art of conflict management involves maximizing constructive conflict and minimizing destructive conflict. To achieve this end, the school administrator must understand conflict--its types, sources, and dynamics--and must master various techniques for managing it. Conflict can be classified by degree of constructiveness/destructiveness, by the kind of issues involved, and by degree of severity. Sources of conflict include communication problems, organizational structure, human factors, and competition over limited resources. Stages of conflict range from anticipation to discussion to open opposition. Since no one conflict resolution method is best, administrators should be aware of all possible techniques, including: (1) avoidance; (2) containment by redressing individual grievances; (3) creation of superordinate goals to motivate cooperation; (4) creative problem-solving; (5) compromise; (6) changes in organizational structure; (7) authoritative command; and (8) reconciliation of conflicting parties' differences. Knowledge alone is not enough; administrators need field experience to develop their conflict management skills. (MLH)

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Chapter 15
Managing Conflict

John Lindelow and James J. Scott

Conflict is a natural part of human existence. It is as surely a companion of life as change, death, and taxes.

Conflict exists on many levels and takes many different forms. Within society, there are many focal points of conflict, where numerous "forces" seem to clash time and again. One of these focal points is the public school administrator. As James Lipham and James Hoeh, Jr., state, "All institutional roles, particularly those in public institutions, are subject to numerous sources and types of disagreement or conflict. But few seem so fraught with conflict potential as that of the public school principal." Larry Cuban observes that "conflict is the DNA of the superintendency. The very nature of the roles that school chiefs must play makes conflict inevitable."

Because conflict plays a recurring role in the lives of school principals and superintendents, those who hold these positions must learn to manage conflict effectively and turn it toward constructive ends. To do this, they must understand conflict—what it is, where it comes from, and how it develops and dissipates. They must, in addition, possess the skills necessary to manage conflict effectively.

The Value of Conflict

As Stephen Robbins notes, the word *conflict* has a negative connotation for most individuals. Indeed, many if not most conflict situations are disturbing to participants and observers alike, and many conflicts lead to destructive ends.

But as many veteran administrators have recognized, conflict is a two-sided coin. Conflict can indeed be disruptive and destructive. But it can also be a source of creativity and constructive action. Many thoughtful people even consider conflict to be "the Mother of creativity." Gordon Lippitt lists a number of negative and *positive* effects of conflict. On the negative side, it

- diverts energy from the task at hand
- destroys morale
- polarizes individuals and groups
- deepens differences
- obstructs cooperative action
- produces irresponsible behavior

- creates suspicion and distrust
- decreases productivity

But on the positive side, conflict

- opens up an issue in a confronting manner
- develops clarification of an issue
- increases involvement
- improves problem-solving quality
- provides more spontaneity in communication
- is needed for growth
- strengthens a relationship when creatively resolved

Conflict can be a valuable source of organizational renewal. According to Richard Schmuck and colleagues, some conflicts "may even provide a creative tension that has the effect of improving school performance." Other conflicts, these authors are quick to add, can seriously weaken a school's instructional program and should be resolved promptly.

Robbins—a strong believer in the value of conflict—has even included in his book a chapter on stimulating conflict within organizations by disrupting communications and altering organizational structure. "Organizations that do not stimulate conflict," he states, "increase the probability of stagnant thinking, inadequate decisions, and at the extreme, organizational demise." Research supporting this contention comes from Jay Hall and Martha Williams (quoted by Robbins), who found that "established groups tended to improve more when there was conflict among members than when there was fairly close agreement."

Conflict in school settings can help prevent teachers and administrators from ignoring what is best for students, says Robert Maidment, who advises principals to "encourage legitimate resistance." "When principals fully embrace the notion that teachers have both the right and the responsibility for legitimate resistance, it again places conflict in a proper—and positive—perspective," he says.

Thus, the effective school administrator should not seek simply to *resolve* all conflicts that arise in the school; rather, he or she should attempt to *manage* conflict by maximizing constructive conflict and minimizing destructive conflict.

The next section explores the nature of conflict. With a better understanding of conflict, the reader can move on to the next two sections, which describe philosophies of conflict management and techniques of managing conflicts. The chapter ends with some comments on training for conflict resolution.

Understanding Conflict

Just what is conflict? *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines it as the "clash, competition, or mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces or qualities (as ideas, interests, wills)." A similar definition

is provided by Robbins, who describes conflict as "all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction." Our main focus in this chapter is on social conflict—conflict between individuals and conflict between groups common to the school environment.

Numerous writers have gone beyond simple definitions of conflict and have sought to more fully characterize conflict by identifying *types* of conflict, *sources* of conflict, and *stages* of conflict. These three views of conflict—discussed in turn below—are valuable for gaining a better understanding of conflict and conflict management in school settings.

Types of Conflict

One typology of conflict already mentioned is that of constructive and destructive conflict. Constructive or "functional" conflicts, as Robbins states, "support the goals of the organization and improve performance." Destructive or "dysfunctional" conflicts, on the other hand, hinder organizational performance and should be "eradicated."

"The demarcation between functional and dysfunctional is neither clear nor precise," Robbins continues.

> No level of conflict can be adopted at face value as acceptable or unacceptable. . . . The level that creates healthy and positive involvement towards one group's goals, may in another group or in the same group at another time, be highly dysfunctional, requiring immediate conciliatory attention by the administrator.

Warren Schmidt and Robert Tannenbaum classify conflict according to the four kinds of issues over which people can disagree. First, disagreement can occur over *facts*, as when two parties "are aware of different pieces of relevant information, accept or reject different information as factual, or have differing impressions of their respective power and authority." Second, disagreement can occur over *goals*—"the desirable objectives of a department, division, section, or of a specific position within the organization." Third, people can disagree over *methods*—the procedures and strategies for getting from here to there. And fourth, disagreement can occur over *values* or *ethics*—the "way power should be exercised."

Stephen Bailey suggests another way of classifying conflict—by its severity or quality. At the first level of conflict severity, there is "an endless simmer of petty personality conflicts reflecting the chemistry and foibles of interacting humans." The wise administrator controls such conflicts by common-sense measures: separating antagonists, redefining roles, and appealing "to the maturity, good sense, and common organizational goals of everyone concerned." Ultimately, says Bailey, the administrator "settles for a low hum of contentiousness as a necessary—and at times healthy—noise of the human condition."

The second level of conflict severity involves differences over

program and budget matters. "These are the daily-diet conflicts that most educational administrators spend the overwhelming part of their time adjudicating and managing," states Bailey.

Level three of conflict severity is that of "revolutionary" conflict, which involves "the legitimacy of regime" rather than program priorities. The wisest course in such crisis situations, Bailey offers, is to redress the grievances that are stimulating the revolution—assuming, of course, that such grievances are legitimate.

Sources of Conflict

A fuller understanding of conflict can be gained by considering conflict's origins. Four primary sources within the school can be identified: communications problems, organizational structure, "human" factors such as personality, and limited resources.

Communications Problems

Much of the conflict in organizations can be traced to faulty communications. For instance, staff members who do not receive regular feedback about their performance may experience poor morale that manifests itself in negative remarks or unwillingness to follow management's directives. Lack of communications between departments can lead to destructive competition. Ill-defined expectations, hidden agendas, lack of candor, and absence of trust are some additional examples of breakdowns in communications that can induce conflict.

Communications problems that are organizational in scope can be difficult to resolve without the assistance of a trained consultant. In cases of interpersonal conflict where communications problems appear to be the source of the conflict, simply bringing the parties together in a problem-solving session can often resolve the conflict. If one party seems to have difficulty "hearing" what the other is saying, communications exercises such as paraphrasing (as discussed in chapter 11) may be of help.

Organizational Structure

The structure of the organization is another possible source of conflict. One study reported by Robbins found that conflict is more likely when jobs are less structured and routinized. Put another way, the greater the extent to which individuals within an organization are permitted to think for themselves instead of routinely following instructions, the greater the likelihood that disagreements will arise over the course of action to follow.

For example, if teachers are required to employ particular methods of instruction, then the methods used by any one teacher are unlikely to generate controversy. But if teachers are given considerable latitude in choosing methods of instruction, some teachers may use methods that provoke debate. Within limits, controversy generated in such a fashion is a reasonable tradeoff

for the increased creativity and flexibility that accrue to an organization when it allows its members some latitude in performing their functions.

The degree to which an organization's structure allows its employees to participate in decision-making also has an effect on conflict. As participation increases, so does the rate of conflict, as several other studies reported by Robbins show. Although the overall *number* of conflicts went up with participation, the number of *major incidents* of conflict went down. Participation in decision-making, Robbins suggests, "permits a greater opportunity for the expression of existing disputes and allows more occasions for disagreements to arise." The same opportunity to express minor conflicts, however, may "prevent minor irritations from developing into major incidents."

Another study discussed by Robbins indicates that "power can facilitate coordination and concurrently reduce conflict." Up to a certain limit, increasing a school principal's formal authority can reduce conflict between the principal and the staff.

Human Factors

In addition to communications and structural sources, conflict can arise from "human factors" within an organization. Whereas communications and structural factors can, in part, be controlled by an administrator, human factors are largely beyond his or her control. Personality traits that have been found to correlate with increased conflict are high authoritarianism, high dogmatism, and low self-esteem. One of the most powerful "human" sources of conflict is differing value or goal systems, which are quite often impossible to change and can only be "managed."

Limited Resources

Another source of conflict is of immediate practical concern to the school administrator—competition over limited resources. When an organization has an abundance of resources, those resources can easily be allocated so that all the parties involved are convinced that they are getting their fair share. When resources are limited, however, allocating those resources so that all concerned receive what they think they deserve becomes much more difficult.

When the science department needs new bunsen burners and the library needs to replace some books but the funds are not available to do both, the principal must decide who gets what. Conflict arises as each department tries to convince the principal that its needs are more pressing than those of the other departments. No matter what decision the principal makes, somebody is going to be dissatisfied. It is the principal's job to ensure that all parties feel they have been treated fairly, even though they may not get what they want.

At the district level, conflict can develop when teachers believe they need to be paid more and taxpayers refuse to provide the necessary funds. Failure to resolve such conflicts can lead to long and costly teachers' strikes.

Stages of Conflict

Another means of diagnosing conflict is by examining its dynamics. Schmidt and Tannenbaum identify the following five stages of conflict development:

> *The phase of anticipation*, in which, for example, a manager knows of an impending change and projects its consequences.
>
> *The phase of conscious, but unexpressed, difference*. Word leaks out about the change, and a feeling of tension begins to build in the organization.
>
> *The phase of discussion*. Information is formally presented about the change. Differing opinions begin to emerge.
>
> *The phase of open dispute*. Differences become more sharply and explicitly defined.
>
> *The phase of open conflict*. Each disputant tries to force his or her view on the others. The only possible outcomes now are win, lose, or compromise.

Other authors dissect the dynamics of conflict differently, and most include a stage of "relaxation" after the conflict has peaked.

Conflict management is usually more effective when the administrator intervenes in the early stages of conflict. As the conflict develops through different stages, different management techniques become useful. "Techniques of prevention and resolution adequate for the incipient stages of conflict are unlikely to be useful during the crisis stage," states Bailey, "and they tend to be irrelevant at the stage of relaxation."

> When conflict is incipient, or in early stages of virulence, a sensitive administrator may release dangerous tension with a special meeting or a joke. When the storm is raging, certain types of meetings become impossible, and the very notion of jokes becomes obscene. When exhaustion is followed by a new-found harmony, the administrator's best therapy may be "natural healing," rather than any conscious strategy.

Philosophies of Conflict Management

According to Robbins, there are three primary philosophies of conflict management. What he calls the "traditional" philosophy prevailed from the late nineteenth century into the 1940s; in this philosophy, "*all* conflicts were seen as destructive and it was management's role to rid the organization of them." The second philosophy, the "behavioral" view, supplanted the traditional philosophy a few decades ago and still prevails in most organizations. The behavioral view differs from the traditional philosophy in accepting conflict as a normal part of an organization's functioning, but it still sees conflict as essen-

tially negative. Hence, the behavioralists concentrate almost entirely on finding ways of resolving conflict.

Robbins advocates a third approach: the "interactionist" philosophy. This approach "recognizes the absolute necessity of conflict," explicitly encourages conflict at times, "defines conflict management to include stimulation as well as resolution methods," and "considers the management of conflict as a major responsibility of all administrators." Indeed, an increase in constructive conflict may be called for in some organizations that have lost their spark of creativity or in which apathy has reached epidemic proportions.

Although there may be times when stirring the pot may be the best remedy for an ailing school or district, most of the conflict management techniques discussed in this chapter deal either with resolving conflict or with channeling potentially destructive conflict into constructive ends. This emphasis on conflict resolution recognizes that the public schools are already in a state of rapid change, with concomitant conflict; that few administrators feel the need to stimulate more conflict, since there is already an overabundance in the schools; and that most administrators are more interested in learning how to manage the conflict that already exists in the schools.

Techniques for Managing Conflict

There are as many methods for resolving conflicts as there are types of conflict and theories about how conflicts should be managed. As we shall see at the end of this section, no one method works best in all circumstances. Hence it is important for the administrator to be aware of all possible conflict management techniques, selecting from them as the situation warrants.

In this section we consider such techniques as avoidance, containment of conflicts by individualizing them, creation of goals to which conflicting parties can agree to, creative problem-solving, compromise and the use of a third party, changes in the organization's structure, use of authority to arbitrate conflicts, and reconciliation of the parties after the conflict has been resolved.

Avoiding Conflict

"The most natural manner in which all animals, including man, eliminate conflict is to avoid it," states Robbins. If Harmon Zeigler and his colleagues are right in saying that school superintendents, with their college degrees from schools of education, are "trained in the tenets of an ideology that defines conflict as pathological and consensus as the most legitimate basis of a decision," then it seems that school superintendents—and, to a lesser extent, school principals— would naturally find avoidance very appealing.

Administrators who do not handle anxiety well are most likely to seek ways of avoiding conflict. Monte Blue says that some administrators will try to reduce the level of organizational conflict—whether it is resolved or not—

in an attempt to lessen the personal anxiety that they feel. Administrators who can handle anxiety can usually cope with conflict; those who cannot "cope well with even low levels of conflict or anxiety generally move into other positions or professions to avoid high levels of stress," Blue says.

Avoidance techniques include ignoring conflict, procrastination, isolation, withholding feelings or beliefs, staffing with like-minded people, and "smoothing." Although avoiding conflict may seem like "the wrong thing to do," it is often a valuable short-term alternative.

Ignoring and Procrastinating

Whenever possible, humans withdraw from conflict and ignore the situation if they can. Sometimes this instinctive response is the best one available. Events often reach their own state of equilibrium, and intervention may be either unnecessary or counterproductive.

A variation of ignoring is procrastination or "deciding not to decide," which may, at times, also be a valuable short-term management strategy. The administrator may need more information or time to understand a situation or may wait for the situation to take clearer form before taking action. Taking a "wait and see" attitude may be the best strategy in these cases. As Maidment puts it, it is "better to regroup than to re-grope."

Deciding when to intervene and "uncover" conflict can be difficult. The administrator must decide whether bringing out a conflict will have destructive or constructive consequences. Low levels of communications and problem-solving skills and low levels of trust among school staff may well engender destructive outcomes. Schmuck and his colleagues state that "uncovering conflict, then, involves a certain risk."

Isolating Conflicting Parties

A manager can avoid conflict between two potentially explosive individuals by isolating them in the organization so that they seldom interact. Two individuals may do this themselves, as Robbins notes, and stake out distinct, nonoverlapping territories. Often, an administrator and a subordinate will use this technique. "In those cases where the employee sees no other viable alternative to his present job and his superior finds the employee's performance to be satisfactory, we can expect this avoidance technique to be effective," says Robbins.

Withholding Feelings

In cases where two individuals find it impossible to avoid each other, each may withhold stating his or her feelings or beliefs in the presence of the other. Such mutual ignoring, of course, only conceals differences, but it does

avoid overt confrontation.

Seeking Like-Minded People

Another means of avoiding conflict is to staff the school with like-minded people. This approach may be appropriate in schools that are extremely conflict torn because of diverse viewpoints. But "the manager who uses this approach consistently runs the risk of reducing the total creativity of the staff," state Schmidt and Tannenbaum. "When everyone in the room thinks the same thing, no one is thinking very much."

Smoothing

"Smoothing" is the process of playing down differences between conflicting parties while emphasizing their common interests. Issues about which there are differences are not discussed, while areas of agreement are stressed. Although smoothing is often relied on, any resolution it achieves will be only superficial; the differences remain and the conflict is only postponed.

Avoiding conflicts in the ways outlined above can be valuable for managing conflict in some situations, especially minor conflicts. When employed to manage major conflicts, however, the same techniques can lead to expansion of the conflict, instead of containment. In the arena of community conflict, for example, Zeigler and his colleagues note that "the literature on fluoridation and school desegregation strongly supports the notion that avoidance leads to increased lay participation. Increased lay participation leads to a more complex management problem."

Individualizing Conflict

Zeigler and his colleagues note that many potential conflicts between school administrators and members of the general public can be contained by individualizing them. These researchers observe that most communications between school administrators and members of the general public are concerned with redressing individual grievances rather than with arguments over school policies.

> The degree to which such complaints can be resolved without resorting to policy modification will be an important predictor of the extent to which conflict can be contained. If individual requests are treated responsively, collective action is less likely to take place.

The following hypothetical example shows how individualizing conflict might work: A high school has a mandatory P.E. program that, for a few weeks out of the year, involves boys playing football. Brad broke his leg playing football several years ago, and—despite his doctor's assurances that the injury is completely healed—his parents want to make sure it doesn't happen again. Accordingly, they want Brad held out of the football portion of the P.E. program.

If the principal takes the attitude that rules are rules and there can be no exceptions, Brad's parents may well try to enlist citizen support for their side. Eventually, what started off as an individual grievance may blossom into a major conflict over the role P.E. should play in an educational program. However, if the principal agrees that Brad's parents have a point and accommodates their wishes—perhaps by working out an alternative P.E. program for Brad for that period when the other boys are playing football—then the matter will probably go no further.

Creating Superordinate Goals

Another technique for managing conflict is the creation of a superordinate goal—a highly valued goal that two conflicting parties can reach only by cooperating with each other. As Robbins explains, "The cooperative environment grows as effort is directed away from concern with separate and independent units to recognition that the conflicting units are part of a larger group." Superordinate goals are popular because of their promise of "win-win" solutions.

Given that all the people involved in the school organization share one overriding goal—educating the children—and given that administrators and teachers have much in common, it would appear that using superordinate goals would be one of the most effective conflict management techniques available at the school building level. However, a word of caution is in order. First, actual superordinate goals that supersede the conflicting parties' individual goals are difficult to create, and manufacturing phantom superordinate goals will fool no one. Second, the mutual trust and confidence needed for conflicting parties to work together are often absent. Finally, as Robbins says, the effectiveness of superordinate goals may be severely limited in cases where conflict originates from personal-behavior differences.

Creative Problem-Solving

> Had the six blind men who came into contact with different parts of the same elephant pooled their information, they would have arrived at a more accurate description of the animal. In the same way, many problems can be seen clearly, wholly, and in perspective only if the individuals who see different aspects can come together and pool their information. (Schmidt and Tannenbaum)

Mutual problem-solving, some writers suggest, is often the best means for resolving social conflict. Conflicts often exist because of a lack of or problems in communicating. Bringing conflicting parties together to discuss their differences can, if properly managed, lead to increased understanding, clarification of differences, and constructive collaboration.

Schmidt and Tannenbaum provide several guidelines for conducting an effective problem-solving session. The administrator should:

- welcome the existence of differences within the organization as a valuable resource
- listen with understanding rather than evaluation
- recognize and accept the feelings of the individuals involved
- clarify the nature of the conflict
- indicate who will make the decision being discussed
- suggest procedures and ground rules for resolving the differences
- create appropriate vehicles for communication among the disputing parties
- encourage the separation of ideas from the people who propose them

Problem-solving is especially valuable for resolving conflicts that arise from communications problems. In a problem-solving session, a great deal of communication takes place. Facts, goals, and strategies are discussed and clarified. Positions become understood. Areas for potential compromise are discovered. Faulty perceptions are corrected.

When group members have varied opinions on some issue yet are not entrenched in their positions, problem-solving sessions can be used to channel the energy generated by conflict into creative solution making. As Robbins notes, however, "problem solving is inherently weak in regard to conflicts based on differing value systems—one of the primary sources of conflict." Problem-solving can elucidate the differences in two value systems, but argument can rarely alter deeply held beliefs. Forced problem-solving between two parties with incompatible value systems, Robbins observes, "only widens the differences and entrenches each of the participants deeper into his position—for all intents and purposes probably increasing, and certainly not lessening, the level of conflict."

Compromise and Use of a Third Party

Compromise is probably the most widely used technique for resolving conflict. Compromise can be generated internally as in a problem-solving session, or it can be externally generated by a third-party mediator or arbitrator.

Compromise does not result in clear winners and losers, and it requires each conflicting party to give up something. "The idea is that it is better to have half a loaf than none at all," says Mary Nebgen. Compromise is the norm in legislative decision-making. And unlike avoidance techniques, Robbins states, "it does result in a decision, though not an optimum one for either party."

Compromise works best, states Nebgen, when "the cooperative interests of the bargainers are stronger than their competitive interests" and when both parties have ample resources with which to bargain.

Often, a building administrator will find himself or herself in the position of a third-party arbitrator or mediator. Two individuals or groups will present the principal with conflicting ideas or requests. The groups may ask the principal to make a decision, or the principal—exercising his or her positional

power—may decide to make the decision. The principal can act as a mediator, clarifying and facilitating communication between the two parties, or can act as an arbitrator, making the final decision after both sides have presented their claims. And if the principal is one of the conflicting parties, he or she may call for a neutral third party to help settle the dispute.

Maidment advises administrators to "intervene cautiously" in a dispute between two staff members.

> An intervention is appropriate whenever (1) the issue is unduly prolonged, (2) other staff members enter the fray and take sides, or (3) the performance of either disputant is adversely affected. The last factor is a critical one requiring immediate attention.

Warning administrators to proceed cautiously, Maidment says, "Those in conflict are 'experts'—they're familiar with the issue, its causes, and its emotional fallout." When intervening, the administrator should talk separately with each party—listening carefully and probing for hidden agendas—and then meet again separately with each party to share observations. Only then, says Maidment, should the disputants meet together to attempt a resolution, either by themselves or with the administrator acting as an "observer, mediator, or adjudicator depending on the complexity, severity, and intensity of the dispute."

If the parties to a conflict accept a compromise simply because each side recognizes that it lacks the power to impose its will on the other, then the compromise is in danger the moment the balance of power between the competing factions changes. However, if the parties to a conflict accept a compromise because each side believes the compromise proposal is a *reasonable* one, then the compromise may prove to be a long-term solution to the conflict.

It follows that the moderator of a dispute should work closely with both sides to develop a compromise that both sides consider to be fair, rather than one that each side grudgingly accepts for lack of an alternative.

Changes in Organizational Structure

Conflicts can often be successfully managed by making changes in the structure of the organization. Group members can be transferred or exchanged, special coordinating or conflict management positions can be created, the communications process can be facilitated with interlocking team structures, grievance and appeal systems can be created, and the number of subunits in the organization can be altered.

Separating conflicting parties, as discussed earlier, is one means of reducing conflict. In some cases, however—as when two departments or other subunits are in conflict—it may make more sense to *increase* contact between the conflicting parties. When this is done, barriers to communication are often reduced.

Robbins cites the example of a major company in which two departments were in continual conflict. The management had the two supervisors

switch jobs for six months, a move that "promoted greater understanding and reduced intergroup conflict as the modified views filtered down" through each department.

Another means of enhancing communication between conflicting departments is to create a position of "coordinator" of the two groups. The coordinator would perform functions in both departments and integrate their functions.

Improved intraorganizational communication can also be gained by creating a system of interlocking management teams in the school or district, as Schmuck and his colleagues suggest. The advantage of such a "multiunit school," state these authors, "is that it offers a communicative link between each hierarchical level and each formal subsystem." In such schools, everyone "knows someone who can communicate directly with the leadership team, and this arrangement permits direct managerial contact with those who may be in conflict."

Small organizations, such as elementary schools, may deal with conflict through regular administrative channels. But more complex organizations, such as school districts, "should have special formal structures alongside the regular managerial hierarchy for this purpose," state Schmuck and cowriters.

Special grievance and appeal systems can be designed to allow organizational members to challenge the rulings of superiors. "By giving the subordinate an alternative to unsatisfactory directives of his superior," states Robbins, this technique "can act to reduce conflict by requiring the superior to rethink the legitimacy of the demands he makes upon his subordinates."

Some research has shown that as organizations become more complex, more conflict occurs. Thus, minimizing the number of administrative subunits may reduce conflict. This approach, however, may be overly simplistic; a complex organization may well function smoothly if designed appropriately.

Too much stress on unity and common organizational goals may also be a source of conflict, state Schmuck and colleagues, especially "when the philosophies and instructional styles of faculty members are highly varied." Conflict in such schools may be successfully managed "by allowing for planned pluralism or school structures in which there are several teams, houses within schools, even schools within schools."

Authoritative Command

In hierarchical organizational structures, states Robbins, "the authority of a higher-ranking individual is the most frequent resolvent of interpersonal or intergroup conflict." In using authoritative command for intergroup conflicts, the principal is, in effect, deciding to be the third-party arbitrator. When the principal uses authority to settle disputes with subordinates, he or she is simply using the traditional power of position to overrule the subordinate.

"Individuals in organizations, with rare exceptions, recognize and accept the authority of their superiors," states Robbins. "Though they may not be

in agreement with these decisions, they will almost always abide by them."

Authoritative command can solve conflicts quickly and neatly. The overuse or misuse of authoritative command, without meaningful input from subordinates, can foment a more serious kind of conflict—challenge to the legitimacy of authority.

The use of force to settle disputes, states Nebgen, "may be most usefully applied to conflicts which arise out of differing goals or values of special interest groups and interpersonal provocation." If the opposing parties are firmly entrenched in their positions and there is little chance for compromise, "only forcing the issue will settle the problem."

As emphasized throughout this handbook, the effective leader utilizes a variety of leadership styles in managing the school, including, at times, an authoritative style. And when the leader decides to settle an issue through authoritative command, or by any other means for that matter, he or she should clearly communicate how the matter will be settled *before* the process begins.

Putting the Pieces Back Together

When a conflict ends because one side succeeds in imposing its will on the other, a higher authority imposes its will upon both, or both sides have exhausted their resources and agreed to a compromise through necessity, a substantial residue of ill-feeling and dissatisfaction may remain. Under such circumstances, an administrator should make a conscious effort to reconcile the conflicting parties and create an atmosphere conducive to everyone working together once again.

One example of such a situation is a teachers' strike, which usually ends only when one side has outlasted the other or each side agrees to a compromise because both sides fear they lack the resources needed to win. It is true, of course, that occasionally a strike is ended because someone comes up with a proposal that both sides genuinely believe to be fair, but this is probably an exception rather than the rule.

A publication of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), quoted by J. William Jones, offers some practical advice to school superintendents who are faced with the problem of what to do after a strike is over. The superintendent must "move quickly to meet the deep feelings of guilt, defeat, victory, anger, envy and hate" left over from the strike. The best way to do that is "to refocus differing segments of the educational community from their hard-fought polarized positions to a neutral meeting ground—*the education of children.*" In addition, the AASA offers the following tips to supervisors:

- Anticipate the emotions of all groups
- Foster a climate for educational renewal
- Totally brief all staff on new contract terminology
- Launch a community and teacher involvement program

Jones offers "Six Points for Principals" who are faced with the aftermath of a strike:

1. The principal must be consistent in his or her dealings with everyone; no favorites, no good guys or bad guys. Any deviation from total consistency will exacerbate the problems left over from the strike.
2. The principal must focus on support for students, particularly through the instructional program. In all cases, the principal must ask, "What's best for students?"
3. The principal must be firm in setting limits for acceptable behavior. While the focus should be on reestablishing human relationships and not on retribution or punishment after the strike, inappropriate behavior from teachers or students cannot be tolerated either. Thus, firm ground rules must be laid down for appropriate staff and student behavior, with fair and consistent penalties spelled out for violations.
4. The principal must quickly, fairly, and equitably implement the terms of the new contract.
5. The principal must watch for and mediate disputes between parents and teachers and strikers and non-strikers. While in the latter case teachers can be bound by rules of post-strike conduct, parents cannot. Principals must personally step in, in such cases, and attempt to mitigate the conflict before it threatens post-strike relations with the community.
6. The principal must expect and be ready to deal with bitterness, anger, challenge of authority, complaints, etc. These are commonplace after a strike, particularly after a lengthy strike where little, if anything, was gained.

The basic principles underlying Jones's advice can be applied to situations other than teachers' strikes. Whenever bitterness or dissatisfaction lingers after a dispute has been settled, the administrator must take the time to devise a plan for treating all the affected parties in a fair and consistent manner.

Some Wise Advice

Bailey, in the final section of his excellent essay on conflict management, offers additional valuable suggestions for successfully managing conflict. First, the administrator should breed an awareness of what is "bugging" colleagues, teachers, and students. The administrator's ability "to recognize legitimate grievances and patent injustices and his willingness to respond to new hungers, new values, and new norms by reasonableness and open-mindedness are essential if conflicts are to be precluded and ultimately resolved in any basic sense."

Second, collective judgment should be substituted wherever possible for personal discretion. "The wise administrator knows how to create baffles and buffers to buy time, to absorb heat, to promote collective wisdom, to insure

a maximum sense of legitimacy for final decisions."

Bailey's third piece of advice is valuable in those conflict situations that have gone beyond a state of rational negotiation. Essentially, the administrator adopts Harry Truman's five-point strategy: estimate your own resources, estimate your enemy's resources, form a judgment about what is to be done, implement your judgment with a plan, and, finally, persuade your leaders of the value of that plan and mass your forces for the attack.

Bailey's final suggestion is that the administrator should be "harshly realistic" about his or her limitations in managing conflict.

> There are times in a year, in a career, in a life when cyclonic winds and waves will roll over everything in sight and when the skill of the ablest mariner is probably less effective than his praying on his knees—if for no other reason than that he has thereby lowered the ship's center of gravity.

When all else fails, the administrator can derive some small measure of hope from knowing that time and circumstance have a way of resolving many of those petty but annoying conflicts that seem to be beyond anybody's control. Jack Greenstein, principal of an elementary school in the Chicago area, tells of his experiences with Jamie, a fifth-grade transfer student—older and bigger than his classmates—who enjoyed bullying the other children and disrupting class. Greenstein tried to win the support of Jamie's mother, but she sided with her son. Then Greenstein shifted Jamie to a different classroom, but soon Jamie's new teacher was pleading with Greenstein to get rid of the boy. Finally, Greenstein helped Jamie's mother find a spot for the boy in a parochial school, but the parochial school sent him home within a few weeks. However, at about the time Greenstein thought he would be stuck with Jamie forever (the boy gave no indication he would ever advance beyond the fifth grade), Jamie's mother moved out of the area, taking her son with her.

Need for a Variety of Approaches

One final observation about the approaches and techniques for managing conflict described in the preceding pages is that, as Edgar Kelley says, "no one method or outcome should be considered to be automatically 'best' for every situation. The resolution of conflict is always unique to the setting in which conflict occurs."

Any administrator who attempts to use the same techniques for different kinds of conflicts, says Bailey,

> is either a genius or a fool. For example, assume that a superintendent observes a raging conflict within his board of education. Quiet catalysis in the form of friendly visits to the homes of contending leaders may be the most useful approach. If the conflict is between two subordinate principals arguing about bus routes, a structured confrontation may be desirable. If the struggle is between the local

John Birch Society and the local chapter of the American Association of University Women over sex education, public rhetoric and careful and elaborate coalition building may be the superintendent's most effective tactic. The point is that such stratagems are not usually interchangeable. Conflict-resolution styles and techniques useful in one context may be quite disastrous in another.

When a conflict occurs, state Diane Frey and Joseph Young, "most people are impulsive about their manner of resolving it. They usually choose a method learned at an early age from significant others in their environment." Administrators, Frey and Young advise, should develop an awareness of the conflict management styles they habitually use and then broaden their repertoire to include other techniques.

One factor that determines the appropriateness of a particular technique is the maturity level of followers. Marvin Fairman and Elizabeth Clark explain that beginning faculty members who are involved in a conflict will expect the administrator to weigh the evidence and then decide the matter on his or her own, whereas more experienced teachers will prefer a less active role by the administrator. Depending on the subordinates' level of experience and responsibility, the administrator may choose among several roles:

arbitrator—listening to both sides and then telling one or both parties to modify their behavior

negotiator—listening to both sides and trying to convince one or both parties to modify their behavior

facilitator—bringing the parties together to work out a cooperative decision

mediator—helping the parties reach a satisfactory compromise

delegator—encouraging the parties to work through the problem on their own

Fairman and Clark warn that it is important to diagnose with care the subordinates' maturity levels: "If you are using a conflict-managing strategy that is at a lower level than the maturity level of your faculty members, it will tend to make them less mature and less responsible."

Training for Conflict Resolution

To help breed an awareness of communications and conflict management processes, numerous exercises have been designed by organizational development specialists (see Schmuck and Runkel) and others interested in the communications process. Exercises of this sort, says Bailey, "are useful in sensitizing the uninitiated to the varied worlds of conflict management."

"But alas," Bailey continues, "most are as effective as learning to swim on the sand. And many lessons learned in sociodramas are forgotten in the heat

and confusion of reality."

Bailey believes that field experience is the best way to develop conflict management skills. Thus, many successful administrators of tomorrow, he states, may come from large families "where from infancy they have participated in bouncing ego brawls and have learned the hard way the value not of unanimity" but of "multianimity"—the "philosophical acceptance and delight in variety."

In preparing administrators for conflict management, Bailey adds, "it can be said that case studies, sensitivity training, and simulation are better than formal theory, that novels and plays are better than textbooks, and that apprenticeships and direct responsibility are better than anything else." In short, says Bailey, in the field of conflict management "we learn by doing."

Superintendents "with doctorates were less successful in managing conflict than those without this advanced degree," report Zeigler and his colleagues. Their explanation for this finding seems to be that colleges of education tend to view conflict as out of place in an environment—such as the school system—where expertise and logic should be the primary tools for decision-making. Consequently, it is quite possible that a prospective superintendent will come out of a college of education with little or no training in managing conflict and with an aversion to doing so. Such an individual would naturally have difficulties coping with a world in which emotion-laden issues—school busing, sex education, contract negotiations with teachers, and so forth—generate conflict.

Schools of education would be well advised to adopt a more benign view toward conflict and to devote more time to courses that discuss conflict and its management, all the while remembering Bailey's advice that actual experience is the best teacher of all.

Conclusion

Conflict is a constant companion of all human undertakings and should be considered a natural, not an anomalous, phenomenon. For most observers and participants, conflict invokes negative feelings, for it often leads to destructive ends. But conflict can also be a constructive force in organizations, leading to increased creativity and adaptability.

The art of conflict management involves maximizing constructive conflict and minimizing destructive conflict. To achieve mastery of this art, the educational administrator must understand conflict—its types, sources, and dynamics—and must be familiar with numerous techniques for managing it.

But knowledge alone is not enough; ultimately, administrators must hone their conflict management skills in the field, in their day-to-day dealings with conflict.